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SUBJECT: IRAQI SUNNI ARAB TEAM PRESENTS OLD GRIEVANCES TO
AMBASSADOR IN TURKEY MEETING

Classified By: (U) Classified by Consul General Deborah K. Jones, Reaso

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1. (C) Summary: At a December 4 meeting in Istanbul organized by the Turkish Foreign Ministry, a delegation of Iraqi Sunni Arab political figures told Ambassador Khalilzad that the "insurgents" want the political process in Iraq to succeed, but seek more credibility in the process. They demanded clarifications of election procedures, calling them opaque. Ambassador Khalilzad said the U.S. wants the election to meet international standards and promised to organize a meeting between the Sunni Arabs and the Iraqi election commission (IECI) and its UN advisors. When the Sunni Arab group called for international election monitors, Khalilzad reminded them that violence prevented the dispatch of international observers. If they want international observers, Khalilzad advised, they should issue a public statement calling for their participation and urging the Sunni Arab community to protect them. The Sunni delegation agreed to this, and the Turkish representatives who observed the session said they could take such a public call from the Iraqi Sunni Arabs to the Organization of the Islamic Conference meeting this week.

2. (C) Summary continued: The Sunni Arab delegation stressed that life needs to return to normal in Sunni Arab regions and that Coalition Forces should stop raids and detentions and release detainees not charged in Iraqi courts. Khalilzad pointed to releases of detainees to date and said there would be more. He cautioned that U.S. forces would respond if attacked, and that the hunt for terrorists like Zarqawi who will never support the political process cannot be stopped. Khalilzad rejected the Sunni Arabs' call for a timetable for withdrawal but underlined the U.S. has no desire for permanent bases in Iraq; as Iraqi security forces grow more capable the Coalition Force presence will diminish. The Sunni Arab team also expressed disdain for the Interior Minister; one prominent Iraqi Sunni Arab politician demanded he be fired because of Interior Ministry abuses. Khalilzad acknowledged there had been problems and noted that the Americans would be involved in investigations of Interior Ministry facilities. Khalilzad urged the Sunni Arab figures to support more Sunni Arabs joining the Iraqi security forces to ensure balance. End Summary.

Sunni Arab Team: Stability, Not Power

3. (C) In a meeting hosted by the Turkish Foreign Ministry in Istanbul, a delegation of six Sunni Arab political figures told Ambassador Khalilzad that the Iraqi Sunni Arab community wants stability, not full political control over Iraq. They said they spoke "on behalf of the insurgency," and sought agreement from the Americans on technical election modalities, near-term confidence building measures and longer-term political changes in Iraq. The group's spokesman, an Iraqi Turcoman businessman in Abu Dhabi named Felah Mustafa, told the Ambassador that the Iraqi Muslim Ulema Council, a rejectionist Sunni Arab religious body, had a representative in Istanbul and supported the list of proposals to be presented but would not meet with the American team in Istanbul.

Khalilzad: Avoid Another Big Mistake

4. (C) Ambassador Khalilzad stressed to the group that the U.S. wants to avoid the division of Iraq and to prevent any foreign country from taking control of it. He urged the Sunni Arab leaders to maximize Sunni Arab participation in the political process, noting that their failure to vote in the January 2005 elections was "the Mother of All Failures." Pointing to the concentration of violence and terrorism problems in the Sunni Arab regions, Ambassador Khalilzad reminded the Iraqi group that U.S. military operations focus on Sunni Arab regions precisely because of the concentration of violence there. Ongoing security problems, however, open the way for sectarian militias and countries like Iran that support them. The violence, therefore, hurts the Sunni Arabs both politically and economically. The Sunni Arab community, he warned, should not be manipulated by hard-liners into

boycotting the political process again.

Election Modalities: Sunni Complaints

15. (C) Tariq al-Hashemi, the leader of the predominantly Sunni Arab Iraqi Islamic Party, stated that the election count procedures were still opaque. Mustafa said the Sunni Arab groups want the December elections to meet minimal international standards. The delegation proposed that:
-- there should be no delays announcing the election results lest there be manipulation of the vote count;

-- Iraqi detainees should have the right to vote;

-- Iraqis abroad should have the right to vote;

-- because of the IECI's lack of credibility, international monitors should come to watch the election;

-- the IECI was not representative of Iraq, as it has only one Sunni Arab board member.

16. (C) Khalilzad agreed that the election should meet international standards and the UN advisory team was responsible for ensuring that it does. The U.S. agreed that the announcement of results should be made promptly. Embassy Baghdad PolCouns reviewed in detail American assistance through USAID for technical assistance to the IECI overseas vote campaign effort headquartered in Amman. He also provided the delegation the names of the two Sunni Arab women who are board members. Hashemi then rejoined that while there might be two Sunni Arab board members, the vast majority of IECI employees were Shia biased against the Sunni Arabs. Khalilzad said the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad would arrange a meeting between the Sunni Arab group and the UN team to review these concerns and later would facilitate a meeting with the IECI board itself. (Comment: Embassy Baghdad has already organized IECI board trips to Ramadi, Fallujah, Tikrit, Mosul, Baqubah and Kirkuk during the past three weeks. End Comment.)

International Observers - Last Minute Push?

17. (C) Khalilzad noted that while the American and British embassies had backed efforts to bring international observers for the December 2005 elections, the violence made it hard to convince any to come. Only a few would be on hand. What might help, he speculated, would be a statement from the Sunni Arab leaders urging that international observers come, and calling on the entire Sunni Arab community to welcome and protect them. The Sunni Arab delegation agreed to issue such a statement, and Khalilzad promised the Embassy would publicly support visits from international observers. The Prime Minister's advisor, Professor Ahmet Davutoglu, who was among the Turkish officials observing the meeting, said the Turks could take a public Sunni Arab call for observers to the upcoming Organization of the Islamic Conference to try to stir interest at this late moment.

Voting in Abu Dhabi

18. (C) Al-Hashemi and Mustafa underlined their concern that Iraqis resident in the Gulf have easy access to an expatriate polling station to be established in Abu Dhabi. They complained that the UAE authorities have issued guidance that Iraqis may not drive to Abu Dhabi from neighboring states like Qatar and that they must have confirmed hotel reservations. Khalilzad agreed to look at how the U.S. might be helpful with the Emirati authorities to facilitate Iraqi expatriate voting.

Sunni Arabs Want More Parliament Seats

19. (C) The Sunni Arab team claimed that the IECI decision on distribution of seats in the future national assembly is unfair because it robbed predominantly Sunni Arab governorates of eight seats. They asserted that Planning Ministry population data made clear that the seat allocation was unfair. The Ambassador reminded the group that the seat distribution came from the election law passed in the autumn by the Transitional National Assembly. It made January 2005 voter lists, not Planning Ministry data, the basis for seat allocation in the December 2005 election. The Sunni Arab team highlighted that Dohuk governorate had an unbelievable ratio of voters to population far beyond the norm. Khalilzad said the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad would look at the data in a September 11 announcement to Iraqi political parties from the IECI. He also urged the Sunni Arab team to raise this

question directly with the UN and IECI.

10. (C) A second set of proposals from the Sunni Arab delegation concerned steps the U.S. could take on security operations that would build Sunni Arab community confidence in the near term. It was urgent that life return to a semblance of normality in Sunni Arab regions, they stated. They proposed that:

-- Coalition Forces stop raids on homes and attacks on Sunni Arab towns and cities;

-- the Coalition Forces release Iraqi detainees not charged in an Iraqi court with crimes; and

-- the U.S. agrees to a timetable for withdrawal of Coalition Forces.

11. (C) Khalilzad responded that a premature Coalition Force withdrawal would be bad for the Sunni Arabs and for Iraq generally. That said, the U.S. aims to withdraw totally from Iraq as soon as possible. He told them that the U.S. does not seek bases in Iraq. We would not set a timetable, but our strategy is clear: we will reduce our forces as Iraqi security forces gain the capability to operate better on their own.

12. (C) In the meantime, Khalilzad cautioned, Coalition Forces will respond when attacked. In addition, there can be no stop to the hunt for terrorists like Zarqawi who do not support the political process in any case. Meanwhile, the U.S. had released 280 prisoners on December 4 and planned to release more after the election. (Hashemi said it was a useless political gesture to release hundreds of prisoners on the one hand while refilling detention centers with newly arrested prisoners.) Khalilzad said he would seek a meeting between the Sunni Arab group and MNF-I CG Casey to discuss security issues.

Post-Elections: A Sunni Longer-Term Agenda

13. (C) Several Sunni Arab delegates asserted that the U.S. must restructure the Iraqi army to include more Sunni Arabs while removing militia members from its ranks. Falah called for "credible" Sunni Arabs to be named to head the Interior and Defense ministries (but they did not press this point). Defense Minister Saadun Dulaymi is a Sunni Arab, Falah acknowledged, but he is only a "puppet." Khalilzad stated that the U.S. wants more Sunni Arabs to join the Iraqi Security Forces, but the response often has been limited. He asked why Sunni leaders have not denounced the intimidation campaign against Sunni Arab recruits. Embassy Baghdad PolCouns reminded the Sunni Arab delegates that then Ulema Council member Shaykh Ahmed Abdelghafur Samarai'e had urged Sunni Arabs to join the ISF, but few others had joined that public appeal.

Interior Ministry - Sunni Arab Venting

14. (C) The Sunni Arab delegation asserted that the Interior Ministry was responsible for widespread abuses, including murder and torture of detainees. Hussein Falluji charged that Interior Minister Bayan Jabr Solagh was ignoring court orders to arrest officers of the Volcano and Hawk brigades on charges of illegal actions. (Comment: we have not heard of this court action, and Falluji when he was not proselytizing PolCouns promised to give us copies. End Comment.) Falluji called for an independent Iraqi judicial commission to look into the abuse allegations across Iraq. The Islamic Party's Hashemi warned that the Interior Minister was staining American credibility and called on Khalilzad to have him suspended.

15. (C) Khalilzad rejoined that Iraq was a sovereign state and the U.S. could not fire its ministers. However, the U.S. had strongly urged the government to investigate what had occurred at the Jadriyah bunker and suspend anyone found responsible pending a final determination of what had occurred. Khalilzad said that together with the Iraqi government, the U.S. would begin checking on other detention facilities in Iraq on December 8. Finally, he told the Sunni Arab delegation that he would work against anyone with ties to a militia from occupying a sensitive security post in the next government.

16. (C) Participants:

Falah Mustafa, Iraqi Turcoman businessman in Abu Dhabi;
Tariq al-Hashemi, head of the Iraqi Islamic Party;
Hamed al-Mutlak, Iraqi National Dialog Front (Salih Mutlak's brother);
Raad Nasser, Iraqi Loyalty Gathering;
Ali al-Mashadani, Iraqi Loyalty Gathering;

Shaykh Ali ad-Daham, Iraqi Loyalty Gathering;
Hussein al-Falluji, Conference of Iraqi People (Adnan
ad-Dulaymi's group)

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